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Department of External Affairs

Canada

Ministère des Affaires extérieures

Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G2

February 29, 1984

Jill Cummings
1443 South Park Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
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Dear Jill Cummings,

I refer to your letter of September 23, 1983 to the Prime Minister regarding Canada's views on the situation in Timor and to Mr. Gorecki's letter of January 5, 1984. This division has been requested to answer the points raised in your letter.

As you are aware the island of Timor was previously divided between West Timor, a province of Indonesia, and East Timor, a Portugese colony. The people who live on the island of Timor, both in the Indonesian province and the former Portugese colony, are related racially, culturally, and linguistically even though those in Portuguese Timor underwent a different evolution as a result of their lengthy period of Portuguese colonization. Many East Timorese have relatives living in the western part of the island and vice versa.

There existed a virtual state of civil war in East Timor in 1975 as various factions including those calling for self determination as well as those calling for incorporation with Indonesia vied for power. After several months of confrontation between rival groups Fretilin forces unilaterally declared their independence on November 18, 1975. However, two days later representatives of four other parties which opposed Fretilin control proclaimed the integration of East Timor into Indonesia and asked for Indonesian assistance in dealing with the Fretilin forces. Indonesian forces subsequently intervened in response to this request. At a meeting in May 1976 representatives of the anti-Fretilin

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factions throughout East Timor submitted a formal request to the Indonesian government for the integration of East Timor and Timor is now an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia.

With respect to the question of Canada's attitude to Indonesian incorporation of Timor, I should like to stress that the Canadian government has never endorsed the manner in which East Timor became a province of Indonesia. The use of military forces in any situation is bound to cause hardship on the civilian population. However it was apparent at the time that the proponents of the Indonesian intervention did have considerable support within Timor. When it became clear that the incorporation within Indonesia was essentially a "fait accompli" it was decided that Canada should concentrate on efforts to improve the welfare of the people of East Timor through promoting humanitarian relief and economic development of the island.

With respect to your concern regarding Canadian actions in the U.N., it should be noted that Canada considers that the U.N. General Assembly resolutions in recent years on East Timor have failed to take account of all aspects of the question and do not reflect present political realities or the humanitarian and developmental needs of the people of East Timor. With respect to the 38th United Nations General Assembly session, you will be aware that the East Timor question was not in fact included on this year's agenda. The U.N. General Committee which is responsible for agenda preparation has decided to defer the question until 1984 so that a report on East Timor being prepared by the Secretary-General can be completed.

Canadian diplomats have on a number of occasions over the years brought to the attention of the government of Indonesia our concern and that of Canadian citizens with respect to the situation in Timor. Although the Indonesian government now regards the situation in Timor as a domestic political matter they have been responsive to representations from Canada and other countries. Many observers have commented favourably on the levels of economic and social development now taking place in the province.

The evolution of Canadian policy vis-à-vis Timor has been on the basis of a number of reports both public and private as well as continuing analysis based on

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material supplied by our own Embassy in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. Canadian policy on Timor, as on any other issue, has been developed taking into account all factors - political, economic, humanitarian, cultural, developmental and commercial - which may impact upon or affect Canada's overall bilateral relationship with a specific country. Current policy has been based on what is considered to be a realistic assessment of current developments in the province of Timor and Indonesia generally. I should also point out that the department is pleased to maintain an ongoing dialogue with representative of organizations who are concerned about human rights situation in Indonesia and elsewhere.

I hope the foregoing will be useful in explaining some additional dimensions of Canadian policy towards Timor.

A.G. Vincent
Director
South and Southeast
Relations Division